

Sunday

Section 5

Newark News Magazine

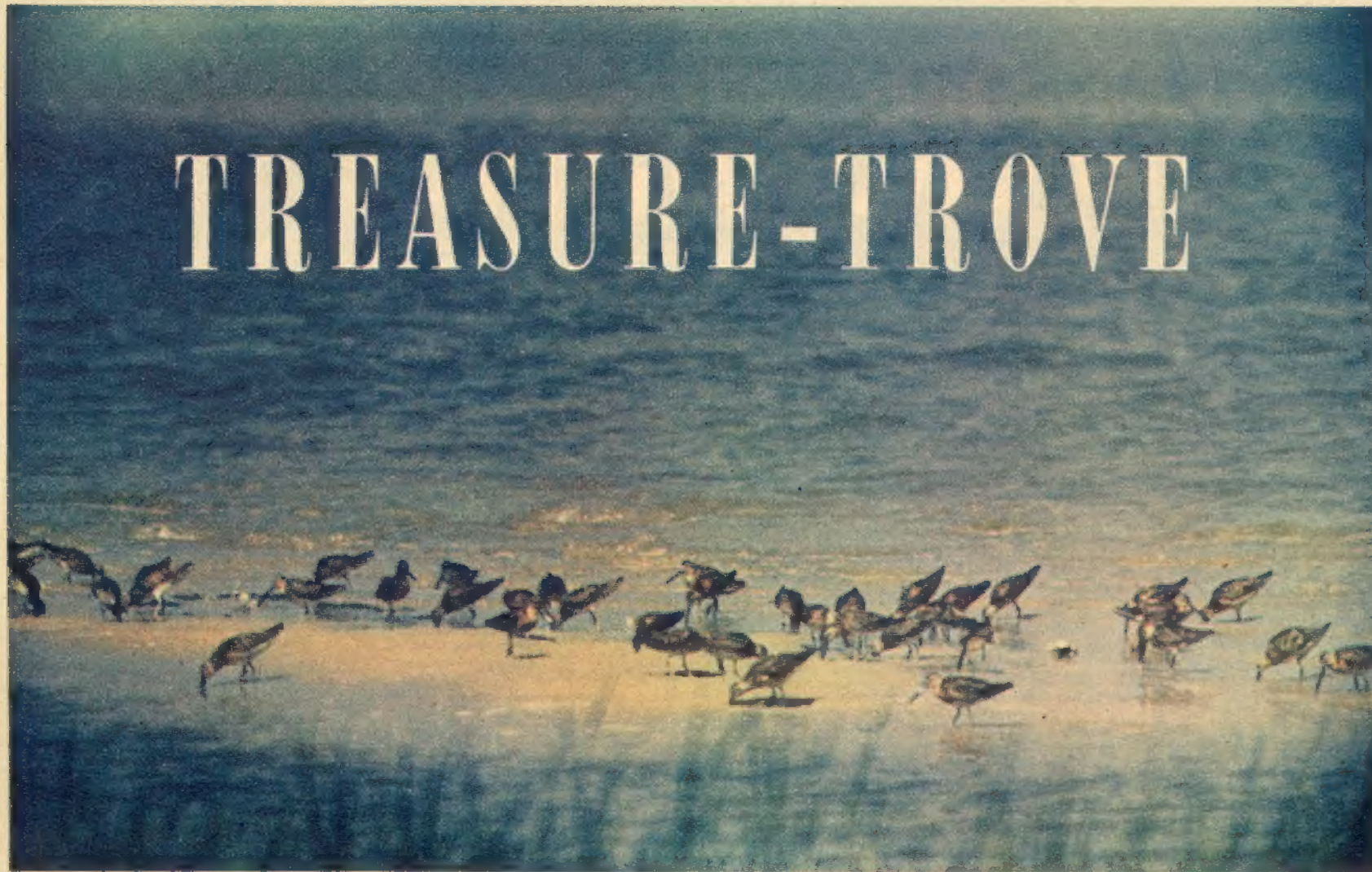
June 23, 1957



COLOR PHOTO BY PHILIP H. GROSCH

NEW JERSEY SHORE : TREASURY OF NATURE . . . PAGE 14

TREASURE-TROVE



FRANK W. McLAUGHLIN

Shore birds (these are Dowitchers) abound all along the New Jersey Shore.

Shell Hunters and Bird Watchers 'Uncover' Own Gems of Sea and Sky Along Tide and Windswept Strand from Sandy Hook to Cape May

EVERYWHERE along the New Jersey shore there is treasure—if the mind and heart are receptive. There probably is actual hard cash treasure: enough old gold and silver coins are found each year to keep alive the dream that some day a wild northeast storm will lay bare the buried sea chests of Cap'n Kidd—at the very moment when you are standing there.

That will-o'-the-wisp is worth contemplating, provided it doesn't divert

This is the 18th and last installment in a series of articles on the New Jersey Shore.

the eyes and ears from treasures much closer at hand—treasures to be had by casting one's eyes along the edge of the strand where seashells are jumbled in wild profusion, treasures to be had by listening for the cry of the laughing gull or by stalking the egret with binoculars and camera.

Treasure is a relative thing. What child would exchange for a doubloon that first fascinating moment when she holds to her ear a huge conch shell and hears the roar of the surf within? Who needs a thousand Pieces of Eight at the time when he finds on a Wildwood beach a perfectly preserved sand dollar?

Nor can money buy more than that still, silent moment of wonder when the herons come home at sunset to

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roost at Stone Harbor. Rich and poor alike can laugh at the sandpiper teetering and dancing on the very rim of a wave, as if afraid to get his feet wet. To a bird lover—or even a casual flirter with nature—treasure on the wing is something to be stored in memory rather than in a stone vault.

EXPENSIVE equipment and extensive scientific background aren't necessary to become a shell collector or shore bird enthusiast. Indeed, more than a little learning can be a dangerous thing from the standpoint of innocent merriment—the conchologist might never settle for less than a perfect shell and the ornithologist can become so obsessed with species that he finds it impossible to understand why a person who never bothers to know a laughing gull from a herring gull can still enjoy both.

These paragraphs are not more than an introduction to the joys of shell hunting and bird watching by the sea. Those snared eventually by their treasure hunts into a desire for wider knowledge (and it does happen) can find a shelf full of books on the subjects at any public library.

Consider shell hunting first. It's as natural as a child seeking a big clam shell to use as a scoop. It's as cheap as breathing or walking. It requires no more skill to enjoy than the ability to differentiate between colors or the skill to tell one form from another.

Shell hunters—regardless of age—move slowly but invariably are amazed

at how far they have wandered. They zig-zag down the beach, veering out to both sides of the reasonably well defined line of shells strewn at high tide mark. They move alone, even if they started out as a group. Each sets his own pace, establishes his own stand-

ards, places his own values: what the first casts aside, the second snatches up. One man's oyster shell is another man's pearl.

Rachel Carson fixes the mood in "The Edge of the Sea"—"a strange

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LEN GEORGE
IRV TUTTLE



"Treasures" are such as a starfish, a "sailor's razor" and a perfect sand dollar (above). At left, Elyn Pooley, 11, of Hackensack, listens to the "sea" in conch shell she borrows on visit to the N. J. State Museum.

ON THE COVER

Egrets at Stone Harbor heronry pictured by Philip H. Grosch, president, N.J. Audubon Society. The bird illustrations in this article are through courtesy of Frank W. McLaughlin, Audubon's executive director and lecturer on the state's natural wonders.

SHORE TREASURES

(Continued From Preceding Page)

and beautiful place." On no two days, as she points out (and as anyone can observe), is the shoreline precisely the same. That is why the shell hunter goes out day after day, to comb the "infinitely mysterious" strand.

Unfortunately New Jersey's beaches offer none of the exotic colors and shapes of shells found in Florida and other tropical climes. Forget the exotic; there still is much to seek.

Possibly the most sought New Jersey shell of all for the amateur is the conch (pronounced "konk" by those who know). It's a large spiral shell, anywhere from four to nine inches in length, with a delicately curved orange or rose-pink opening. This is the shell which a child can hold to his ear in mid-February and hear again the sea, even as it sleets outside his home in Newark or as a blizzard rages past his farmhouse in Kansas.

CONCHES are of two varieties—channeled and knobbed. The names are descriptive: the channeled has a groove or channel along its outer spiral, the knobbed has little knobs or horns on the spiral. Both are subject to ruinous battering from the waves; thus chances of finding whole specimens are best on the bay sides of the barrier beaches or on islands out in the bays. Bayside, however, the conches are usually covered with a

hairy matting which tends to hide the attractiveness.

The conch's beginnings are of interest, since the neophyte beach comber is unlikely to link the big shells with the necklace-like strings of conch (or whelk) egg cases found often on the beach. The cases, each about the size of a quarter, are like parchment in texture and color. There are nearly a hundred cases on a string, nearly 40 eggs in a case. From these are hatched the young conches, the size of a grain of rice but perfectly formed.

The conch shells are the most spectacular of the single spiral shells, but the range of these univalve shells is reasonably broad on New Jersey beaches. This family of "sea snails" varies downward in size to the periwinkles, oyster drills and little dog whelks. Periwinkles, long ago prized by Indians as wampum (treasure is a much-changing thing), are found in the salt marshes between half tide and high water mark. Often they are found clinging to reeds.

OYSTER drills serve a predatory purpose in nature. The drill is brown or green in color and uses its long filelike "tongue" to cut through a shell to kill and eat the oyster within. The drill is common and prettily shaped, and shell collectors need be only moderately concerned with its killer role.

Another predator prized for its appearance rather than its habits is the moon shell, enemy of the clam. Two kinds are found on New Jersey shores



FRANK W. McLAUGHLIN

Fledgling American Egrets pose warily in Stone Harbor heronry.

—the more numerous "shark eye" or southern (lobed) moon shell and the northern moon shell. The slightly advanced shell collector knows the difference—the northern shell spirals around an opening in the bottom, the "shark eye" has that opening covered

by a callus. Small matter to the initiate, who finds any moon shell a bright addition to his collection.

MOST of the shells along the New Jersey beaches are those of the bivalve or mussel family—the clams and

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The biggest thirst will vanish! But best of all, you'll appreciate Krueger's true-beer flavor.



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Left: Young Osprey, latest in line of famed shore birds, is alarmed at approach of photographer to his pole-top nest.

oysters and scallops. Commonest of all is the big surf clam shell, about six inches across and so easy to find that most of them are left to bleach white. Often after a fall or winter storm the beaches are covered with surf clams.

Surf clams are a child's favorites because of their numbers, because of their size, because they make handy sand scoops, because their size and shape prompts painting as ash trays for grandfather at Christmas time. The supply appears inexhaustible; for

every one taken away, two seem to take its place.

Other clam shells include that of the Quahog or hard clam, about five inches in diameter and readily identified by the purple color inside its shell. Indians also prized this shell

as wampum back in the days when applied conchology could make a man more money than it makes him today. Related, too, are the small, stout little ribbed shells of the bloody clam and the three-inch shells of the ponderous ark.

The most curious of the clams is the razor clam, about six inches long, handsomely colored and most fragile. It is difficult to find whole along the beachfront because the pounding of the waves soon destroys the thin shell. The "Razor" when alive inhabits deep sandy bottoms and disappears rapidly at the approach of danger—faster, it is said, than a man can dig. The "sailor's razor," therefore, is not easy to find—but it's worth the search. More common is the so-called "stout razor," a shorter, stubbier, harder first cousin.

EVERY amateur's collection has an oyster shell, probably many, because these 6 to 10-inch-long shells are seldom alike and they come in a sufficient variety of colors to make it seem natural to pick up many of the crusty shells.

Obvious on every New Jersey beach is the scallop, the fan-shaped shell whose form has become familiar because of the advertising of a gasoline

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ZING!

KRUEGER BEER

SHORE TREASURES

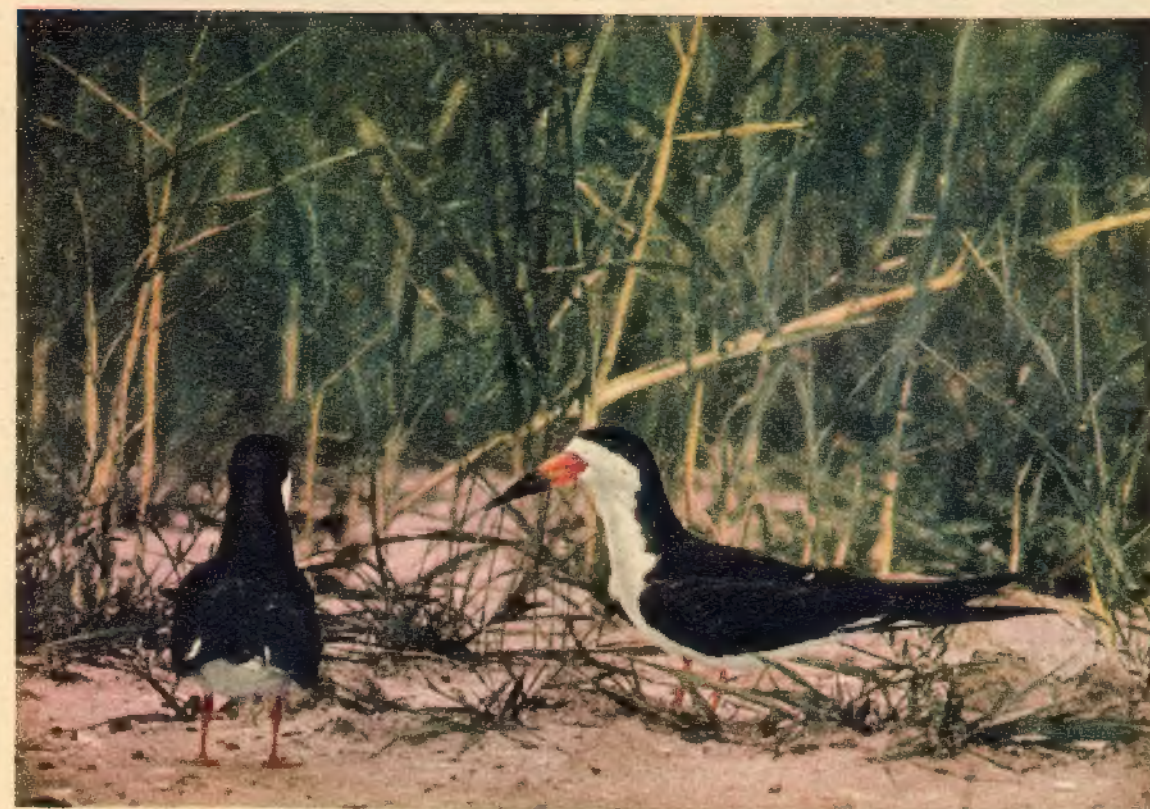
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company. The scallop is a fine shell delicate in appearance, yet sturdy enough to remain whole on the beach. The scallop comes in a range of colors; no collection (again thinking of the beginner) is complete without several scallop shells.

The range of collecting possibilities extends through some 75 varieties of shell fish in New Jersey waters. Beaches are littered with the little smooth-surfaced blue (or black) mussel, varying from an inch to three inches in length. Nearby can be found the ribbed mussel, whose mother-of-pearl luster in the center of the brown-edged outer shell makes it easy to identify.

Nearest to treasure in appearance are the thin little jingle shells. These crisp little shells, which can be crushed between the fingertips, have waxy lusters of silver and gold and a variety of other colors through black. Sometimes they are confused with the "dead sailor's toenails" but that hard, yellowish, waxy "toenail" is not a shell at all. Rather, it is the "door" which the moon shell uses to close its opening when disturbed.

ANY New Jersey beachcomber on the edge of the sea considers it a day well spent when he finds a sand dollar (or sea cookie). This is the delicate, flat, whitish shell of a kind of star-



Black Skimmers are seen often on Long Beach Island's lower end.

fish, a little round shell whose surface bears the mark of a star and five identical perforations. He is fascinated by the little black "Devil's purse" (or Maiden's purse)—not really a shell at all, but the egg purse of the skate.

Equally, there is a thrill in finding

a sea horse, a perfect starfish or an uncrushed king crab. These are the animals of the sea, the throwbacks to days of long eons ago—the days when life began in the ocean. The king crab, for example, is related to the extinct trilobites and is virtually the

same in appearance as its ancestors of 250 million years ago.

The shell seeker wanders down the beach, gently nudging aside a shell with her toe. She stops to examine a specimen, picks it up, studies it in relation to everything else she has. After due deliberation she throws it aside as something not worth prizing. Her male partner, several paces behind and lost in the realm of univalves and bivalves, picks up the shell she has discarded as just the thing he needs.

Meanwhile, up the beach, a man with the binoculars seeks treasure, too, as he sits in his beach chair. His binoculars pick up an osprey, the great bird of the telephone pole set. The osprey whistles piercingly, then plunges unerringly out of the blue sky into the sea to snatch a fish from the water. Then up from the waves rises the osprey and levels off to feed the young in a bulky nest atop a utility pole.

THE man with the binoculars could be a dedicated, admitted, foresworn birdwatcher. In that case, he won't mark the osprey down on his chart of "birds seen." He will have seen so many osprey that his interest now far transcends mere identification. If he is a dedicated bird watcher, he's at the right place; few areas in the country offer so much opportunity as the New Jersey shore to see so many birds.

Perhaps the man is merely inter-

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A thirty foot putt drops into the cup...zing, what a thrill! You take your first deep swallow of Krueger Beer...and, zing, what a taste-thrill! For here is that true-beer flavor that leaves you satisfied...and, yes, eager for another glass. No doubt about it—it's got zing! So we suggest you make your next beer a Krueger Beer.



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ested in nature and natural settings. He's still in the right place and he'll do himself a big favor if he eases himself out of his beach chair to visit Brigantine National Wild Life Refuge, 11 miles northwest of Atlantic City and easily reached by automobile off Rt. 9. This 16,000-acre refuge is a veritable bird's paradise—and where there is paradise for birds there, too, is a paradise for those who only stand and watch.

Development of the Brigantine refuge since the first land was purchased in 1939 has centered on dike construction to create fresh-water marshes. About 900 acres of the normally salt marsh area have been diked and the dikes serve a double purpose—in addition to defining the fresh-water marshes, they also permit an autoist to drive much farther out into the salt marshes than ever before possible.

Brigantine is fascinating the year-around. In wintertime more than 140,000 brant (a type of sea goose) use the refuge as a winter home. The conjunction of salt and fresh-water marshes makes it astoundingly rich in birds in spring, summer and fall. Out in those marshes 17 avocets were seen last summer, a surprising thing when it is pointed out that the avocet has been away from New Jersey as a breeder since 1859.

THE avocet is possibly of greater interest to the long-time bird fancier than it is to the beginner. Nevertheless, the beginner foresighted enough

FRANK W. McLAUGHLIN



Piping Plover on nest blends readily into the beach background.

to bring along binoculars—can see a brilliant array of birds. Hundreds of egrets crowd the flats and many other large birds are there in August.

Frank McLaughlin, executive director of the New Jersey Audubon Society, runs trips out to the refuge.

Last year on one trip he took along a Texan of the caricatured "what've you got that Texas doesn't have bigger and better" type. Mr. McLaughlin promised him a minimum of 50,000 birds and the Texan laughed heartily, ignoring the information that

219 different species of birds have been catalogued at the refuge. Out at Brigantine the Texan swept his glasses around in an arc and slowly took in an estimated 80,000 to 100,000 birds of all sizes and types.

"I'll be danged," said the Texan in awe. "I wouldn'ta believed it. Not outta Texas, I wouldn'ta."

BRIGANTINE refuge is worth seeing, even if the visitor thinks he cares for birds only on Thanksgiving Day. Nevertheless, there are dozens of other places where quantities of birds may be seen, with the opportunities increasing as the nature enthusiast proceeds southward along the shore. Crowded conditions along the north shore have reduced breeding areas and consequently reduced adult bird life.

The southern tip of Long Beach Island is an excellent area to watch shore bird migrations, beginning in late July and picking up pace through August and September. That sandy region, now a protected refuge, is alive with black skimmers and the common and the least terns. This is also a breeding ground; in late June and July the young shore birds can be seen—often hiding in the shade of a big clam shell to ward off the cruel rays of the sun.

Island Beach is a prime place to watch shore birds, of course, but it has the double disadvantage of being not readily accessible and requiring a permit to visit. Much easier to see

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ZING!

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SHORE TREASURES

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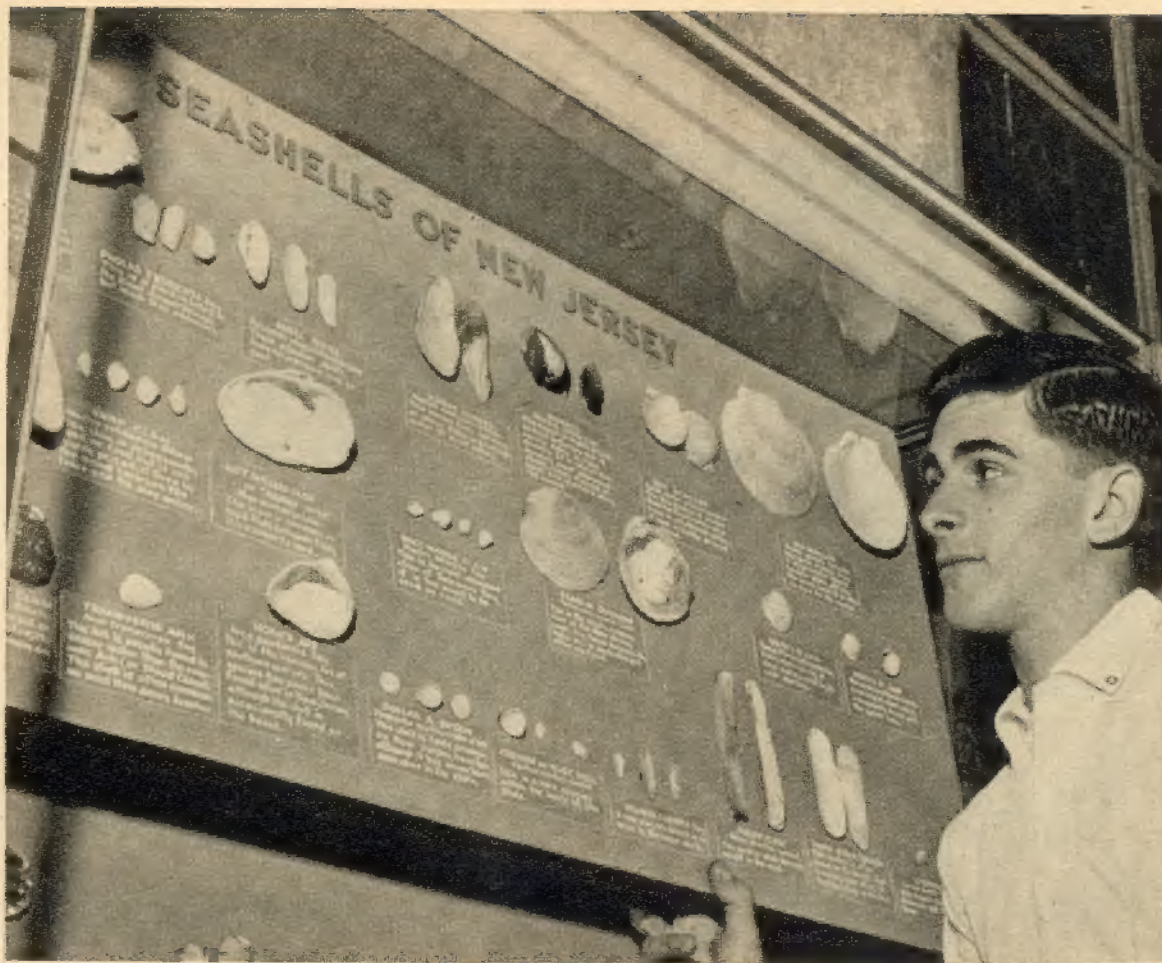
are the broad stretches of still unspoiled lands in Cape May County.

SURELY a visit to the heronry at Stone Harbor is rewarding for anyone. No heronry in the country is as easy to observe, because this municipally owned preserve is right on Ocean Drive. Here can be seen American egrets, snowy egrets, little blue herons, black-crowned night herons. The thick forest shelters thousands of the birds in summer breeding season and during that time the adult birds are in and out of the treetops all day long carrying food to the young.

Thirty-five years ago Stone Harbor's heronry would have been considered impossible. Wanton slaughter of egrets and heron of all kinds continued through the latter part of the 19th century as no lady worth her keep considered herself well dressed unless a half dozen birds had been sacrificed to make her hat. Records tell of professional egret hunters "knee deep" in birds in Cape May County in the 1880s.

Even as recently as 1930 the total count of snowy egrets in all New Jersey was a mere nine. Today, because of protection, the snowy egret is common in the southern New Jersey shore marshland. For all his commonness he is a bird of rare beauty—beautiful enough for a hat, true, but so much more striking as he rears his gracefully curved neck over the marshland reeds.

Cape May County is one large year-around bird haven. Its location—Cape May Point is on the same latitude as Washington, D.C.—mingles southern and northern birds. Its unusual merg-



Michael Boggess, museum trainee, views part of the arrangement of seashells on display at New Jersey's State Museum in Trenton.

ing of upland pastures and woodland with marshes and barrier beaches means a large spread of shore, marsh and upland birds. Finally, the Cape is important to birds (and those who watch) because it is a prime migratory center.

EACH October bird watchers from all over the east converge on Cape May to witness birds in migration. A northwest wind will make the Cape thick with birds; as many as 180 different species have been sighted on a single weekend! Birds at times are everywhere: thronged in the trees,

clustered on the boardwalks, thick on the rigging of ships close to shore and, when exhausted, even resting on the shoulders of watchers. There is a recorded instance of a breathless hummingbird resting for 15 minutes on the scarlet shirt of a newspaper photographer.

Cape May Point's sanctuary, fittingly enough, is named for the late Wittmer Stone, the revered and learned bird watcher whose definitive "Bird Studies of Old Cape May" is must reading for anyone who decides the time has come to know a common (or even a "least") tern from a robin.

Mr. Stone's two books are long and detailed, an unfortunate thing in a way, because his passion for detail often obscured his charming ability to write about nature.

There is no real way to get to know the names of shore birds except through a bit of reading in or through any of the good books on birds (most of them nowhere near as long as Mr. Stone's work). Nevertheless, not knowing names doesn't necessarily limit the enjoyment to be gained from watching birds.

It isn't necessary to know, for example, if the gull tacking into the face of a stiff breeze is a laughing or herring gull. His zig-zagging and graceful perseverance can still be worth noting. It isn't vital to know a sandpiper from a plover to enjoy the dance of the little birds at wave's edge. The sheer handsomeness of an egret glimpsed close up through binoculars isn't necessarily enhanced by knowing whether he's an American or a snowy.

Still, why be lazy? Find out—and really get far more pleasure out of an inexpensive hobby than the expenditure of a little reading time would indicate. It really is worth while to know a tern from a plover! Such a book as Roger Barton's "How to Watch Birds" can get an amateur off on the right eye and ear.

There is treasure to be found, you see, and the greater the digging, the greater the treasure—whether the hoped-for treasure be gold and silver, sea shells or birds. The whole thing is cumulative: the gold-digger can become a shell seeker and the avid shell hunter is likely to become at least a casual bird watcher and vice versa. Fresh air and the excitement of finding something new are the common denominators.



Cape May Lighthouse overlooks bird haven at the Point, prime migratory center because area marks meeting of fresh and salt water.